

**December 16, 2003**

**WEST VIRGINIA BULLETIN NO: WV300-4-1**

**SUBJECT: LTP – Local Work Group Meetings**

**Purpose: To Provide Guidance for FY2004 Local Work Group Meetings**

**Expiration Date: This Bulletin expires: February 29, 2004**

**ACTION REQUESTED BY: February 6, 2004**

**The following guidance is provided to NRCS staffs assisting the Conservation Districts to conduct Local Work Group meetings in order to provide advice and recommendations for implementing the FY2004 Farm Bill programs.**

**It is intended that the Local Work Groups (LWGs) should not need to spend the time and amount of effort that was put into developing the original Farm Bill Proposals that were developed last year. This year we are asking the Local Work Groups to simply review the proposals made last year, and to make any recommendations for improving the implementation of the Farm Bill programs to the State Conservationist by February 6, 2004. The proposals submitted last year do not need to be rewritten.**

**In addition, the State Conservationist wants to have some specific input on the following items and asks for your assistance in getting the following input from your LWG.**

- 1) The LWGs are encouraged to review and confirm their LWGs “Priority Resource Concerns”. The State Conservationist asks that each LWG specifically identify the top five (5) resource concerns, in order of priority. The ASTC(FO)s and DCs should refer to the list of Resource Concerns in the Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG), Section III, to help the LWGs use the same terminology to identify concerns consistently within West Virginia. The LWGs are encouraged to review the National Priorities to insure their Priority Resource Concerns are consistent. The National Priorities may be found in the Draft EQIP Manual dated May 22, 2003, Section 515.13.**

- 2) Review the FY2003 approved Practice/Cost List. Are the costs still accurate? If the LWGs recommend that a cost needs to be increased, provide written justification for the increase. If the LWGs wish, they may also recommend a lower cost share rate on structural practices, or lower incentive payment for land management practices. Please note: We have been asked by some DCs if nutrient management on grazing land can be paid as a cost shared practice, rather than an incentive (flat rate) payment. The EQIP legislation specifically says that land management practices are eligible for incentive payments, rather than traditional cost sharing. Nutrient management is considered a land management practice and is to be paid as an incentive payment. Nutrient management on grazing land will continue to be a component of Prescribed Grazing.**
- 3) Review the FY2003 approved Ranking Criteria. Are any changes recommended to assure that applications are ranked fairly? Keep in mind that we are still directed to be “size neutral” and not to rank according to how many acres or number of animals, etc., are involved. Under separate cover, sample ranking sheets from the Environmental Defense Fund will be sent to you, providing additional ideas on developing ranking sheets.**
- 4) Do the LWGs have any recommendations regarding the Limited Resource Farmer (LRF) and Beginning Farmer (BF) cost sharing? Last year the proposals ranged from providing the full 90 percent available in the legislation, to providing the same cost share rates offered to any other farmer. The State Technical Committee recommended that NRCS in WV should provide the full 90 percent cost sharing to both LRFs and BFs statewide in FY2003 and the State Conservationist approved cost lists on that basis. Did this work well in the LWGs, or do the LWGs recommend that this be changed? If a change is recommended, what should the change be?**
- 5) The State Conservationist will establish maximum state wide cost share rates for practices, similar to last year. Cost share rates are set to encourage farmers and landowners to adopt and install various conservation practices. At what cost share rate in the LWGs area would farmers and landowners adopt and install the various conservation practices? Last year, some LWGs recommended rates less than 50 percent for some practices, with the intent that some practices might be cost shared above 50 percent. Does the LWG recommend that any of the practices cost shared less than 50 percent in your LWG should be raised? Can any practices cost shared at 50 percent be lowered, and if so, how much? Do the LWGs feel that any of the practices cost shared above 50 percent can be lowered, and if so, how much? Do the LWGs feel that any of**

**the practices need a cap on the amount or dollar amount of any practice?**

- 6) Is the state EQIP allocation formula appropriate and fair? In FY2003, there were three equally weighted factors:**
- a. The acres of grazing land in the LWG (1997 Census of Ag.)**
  - b. The acres of cropland in the LWG (1997 Census of Ag.)**
  - c. The number of unfunded EQIP applications in the LWG.**
  - d. Additional allocations were made for the karst areas and priority TMDL areas.**

**The Designated Conservationist in each of the LWGs will document any recommended changes from the approved FY2003 Ranking Criteria and/or the Practice Cost List. Please insure to clearly identify any and all changes being recommended, by highlighting and explaining those items on a copy of the material. The State Conservationist will make decisions for FY2004 EQIP implementation based on recommendations from the LWGs and State Technical Committee.**

**Remember that the purpose of the LWGs is to provide advice to NRCS on the implementation of the conservation programs within the state. The State Conservationist receives advice from each of the LWGs and from the State Technical Committee. Decisions are made by the State Conservationist after reviewing advice from these many sources, and following agency policies based on the legislation and program rules.**

**Additional training and information on Locally Led Conservation is located on the Social Science Institute Web Page at [www.ssi.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.ssi.nrcs.usda.gov).**

**If you have questions or need additional information, please contact Jim Piper, Assistant State Conservationist for Operations Management, at (304) 284-7543.**

**/s/**

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